

April 2006

Public Transportation and Rail Division Monthly News

This newsletter highlights the division's progress and milestones in these areas:

- Office of Transit Mobility
- Public Transportation
- Sound Transit Program
- Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation
- Passenger Rail
- Commute Trip Reduction/Transportation Demand Management
- Announcements and Upcoming Events

Division News

Fiscal responsibility and targeted investments delivered in Supplemental Budget

On March 31, Governor Gregoire signed into law the state's supplemental budget. Here are highlights of budget changes for WSDOT's Public Transportation and Rail Division:

Commute Trip Reduction

The legislature added \$750,000 to implement the new Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) program. WSDOT will allocate these funds to local governments and regional transportation planning organizations. \$3.9 million was provided for the Vanpool Program to purchase 150 new vans to meet increased demand.

For more information on the Commute Trip Reduction and Vanpool program, see the article in the Commute Trip

Reduction/Transportation Demand Management section of this newsletter or visit <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/tdm/>

Regional Mobility Grant Program

\$20 million was provided to implement 13 projects in the Regional Mobility Grant Program established by the 2005 Legislature. Projects receiving funding include 2 service expansion projects, 8 park & ride expansions, 2 roadway improvement projects, one station project and 1 bus purchase project. The grant program provides inter-county transit service, park and ride lots, rush hour transit service, and capital projects that improve the connectivity and efficiency of the state's transportation system. For more information, visit http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/transit/otm/regmob_grant_program.cfm

Passenger Rail

The legislature adjusted the rail budget to meet changing needs for passenger and freight rail projects. An additional \$50 million was allocated to the Vancouver Rail Project in the 2009-11 biennium. These funds will complete construction that will begin in the 2007-09 biennium on this redesigned project. The timeline for the construction of the Point Defiance Bypass project (\$58.7 million) was moved forward to the 2007-09 biennium to coordinate investments with Sound Transit. In addition, the department will begin providing Amtrak Cascades service to Stanwood upon completion of a station project currently underway. For more information on passenger rail activities, visit www.wsdot.wa.gov/rail



CTR Task Force members surround Governor Gregoire as she signs the CTR Efficiency Act.

Office of Transit Mobility

Transit Mobility Advisory Committee building 2006-07 work plan

The Office of Transit Mobility Advisory Committee met to discuss a 2006 work plan including the development of a Statewide Strategic Plan for Public Transportation, a Park and Ride lot program, and Performance Measures.

Principles for a Statewide Strategic Plan for Public Transportation

- The plan should reflect that public transportation should provide basic mobility to the citizens of Washington State. For urban areas, the Office of Transit Mobility should identify the role of the state and ways to:
- Maximize use of the existing transportation system;
- Move more people and goods on regional corridors;

- Further coordination and integration between the various planning efforts at the state, local and regional levels including transit agencies;
- Target improvements on congested corridors to improve the movement of people.

To support these changes, an OTM strategic plan work group will generate recommendations that will:

- Clarify the role of WSDOT in public transportation on regional corridors and in urban areas;
- Evolve the role of the Transit Development Plan process to better align with data collection needs of strategic plan;
- Better align the various planning processes, inventory reporting requirements and map services within the system;
- Consider ways to improve integration of public transportation in the transportation system – Mobility threshold concept

Framing the Park & Ride Program

An additional OTM work group will be formed to identify recommendations on the state's role in park & ride lots. Nearly one-third of the 300 park and ride facilities in the state are operated by WSDOT. Over the next nine months, the Park and Ride work group will develop recommendations in the following areas:

- Defining the role of WSDOT in the various types of the park & ride lots
 - Supported by an inventory and type categorization
 - Preferences of facility ownership and operation;
- Defining the role and function of P&R lots in relation to roadway/highway performance;
- Recommend siting criteria for new locations or expanding existing lots;
 - Supported by an assessment of the performance of facilities on the transportation system;
- Identification of barriers and recommendations for resolution.

Volunteers interested in participating on the Strategic Planning or Park & Ride work groups should contact the WSDOT Office of Transit Mobility at smithtl@wsdot.wa.gov or at 206-464-1238.

Public Transportation

WSDOT helps transit systems request federal funding for purchasing buses

On behalf of several rural public transportation systems, WSDOT requested \$7.5 million through the Federal Transit Administration 2007 Rural Transit program. This funding would enable transit systems to replace aged buses with approximately 48 new vehicles and to continue providing critical bus services in 12 counties. WSDOT requested the funding to help the rural transit systems provide access to jobs and basic services for our citizens, including youth, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. The following table outlines the request:

WA Small Bus Program of Projects – FFY 2007 Section 5309 Request

Rural Transit System	Request
Clallam Transit System	\$ 610,000
Columbia County Public Transportation	119,000
Garfield County Transportation	68,000
Grant Transit	700,000
Grays Harbor Transit	1,265,000
Island Transit	1,300,800
Jefferson Transit	845,000
Mason Transit	450,000
Pacific Transit	208,000
Pullman Transit	1,292,000
Twin Transit	174,000
Valley Transit	505,000
Total	\$7,536,800

Public Transportation Grants Program Advisory Committee starts forming

On March 13, WSDOT held a kick-off meeting to start establishing a Public Transportation Grants Program Advisory Committee (G-PAC). Approximately 60 participants learned about the goals and structure of the advisory committee and started forming work groups. During the initial meeting, participants divided into four workgroups to discuss performance measures for the grants program. Work groups will provide recommendations to WSDOT on a variety of issues including program design, criteria, and definitions of grant program effectiveness.

Even if you didn't attend the first meeting, we want your ideas and feedback. You can take a survey, learn about future meetings, and let us know if you want to participate in a work group. Please visit the G-PAC Web site at: www.wsdot.wa.gov/transit/g-pac/default.cfm.

Asotin County Transit to hire General Manager

In March, WSDOT's public transportation staff attended Asotin County Transit's board meeting. WSDOT discussed the basic responsibilities for the Public Transportation Benefit Area (PTBA) including planning, public outreach, and data reporting. Staff recommended that the board hire someone to oversee the contract with the service provider, Valley Transit in Lewiston, Idaho, and to help meet the legal requirements of a PTBA. After staff offered to help with hiring and training, Asotin Transit's board decided to hire a part-time General Manager.

Asotin County established an official transit system in 2004 when the local community passed a 0.2 percent sales tax for public transportation. A 5-year sunset clause requires the county to go before voters again in 2010 for continued funding.

ACCT

Tribal Transportation partnership in Washington gets national attention

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) released six case studies of innovative coordination practices between tribes, states, and planning organizations. The case studies highlight a range of practices implemented by tribal and non-tribal governments to advance tribal consultation in statewide and metropolitan transportation planning. The case studies describe current practices, the outcomes of these approaches, and lessons learned.

One of the case studies highlights coordination in Washington among the Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC), the Nisqually Indian Tribe, and the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation. The case study describes how regional coordination increased the visibility of tribal transportation needs and how the regional coordination was achieved. Using planning funds provided by the Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation (ACCT), TRPC facilitated the local ACCT coalition in analyzing Thurston County's rural and specialized transportation needs. The local coalition is made up of social service and transportation providers, tribes, and other community stakeholders that explore ways to serve the public transportation needs of the county's rural areas. TRPC then initiated a public transportation project to serve the tribes and other rural communities with funding from WSDOT's Public Transportation Grant Program.

To read more about the case study, please visit <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep/tribaltrans/ttpcs/washington.htm>.

Passenger Rail

Legislature changes train speed law

The 2006 Legislature approved changes to the law regulating train speeds, to align state and federal laws. The new legislation clarifies the state's roles and responsibilities in relation to the Federal Railroad Safety Act (FRSA), and establishes a new process to change train speeds.

The new legislation was jointly developed after extensive stakeholder input. Both BNSF Railway and the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (WUTC) worked closely with legislative staff to ensure the proposed legislation would not compromise safety. Increased train speeds will improve both passenger and freight mobility by enabling more trains to travel on the existing tracks. It will allow Amtrak to increase speeds in some locations and will allow freight trains to increase speeds to keep freight moving to and from our ports.

To change train speeds in a location, the railroad must notify the WUTC and the community of the proposed change. Sixty days after the notification, the speeds can be changed, if there are no unique local safety conditions. If there are unique local safety conditions, the WUTC will hold a hearing on the matter.

WSDOT teams up with Regional and Port Interests

On March 29, the WSDOT Rail Office and Freight Strategy and Policy Office met with the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments, the Ports of Kalama, Longview and Woodland, community leaders, shippers and state representatives to discuss current rail conditions and future rail needs. This information exchange focused on a variety of issues, including port expansion and enhanced use of rail at Kalama and Longview, current challenges shippers experience with their existing rail service, and the WSDOT Rail Passenger program's Kelso-Martin's Bluff (KMB) project. The KMB project, which has a variety of freight and passenger components, was discussed in detail. Work continues on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the KMB project. As an outcome of the meeting, a working group staffed by the Cowlitz Wahkiakum COG and the WSDOT Rail Office was formed to continue dialogue among the various partners to further refine rail needs in the region.

Commute Options

Governor signs CTR Efficiency Act

On March 29 Governor Chris Gregoire signed the Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) Efficiency Act, Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6566. Governor Gregoire was surrounded by members of the CTR Task Force and program partners celebrating the culmination of two years of work to improve the CTR Program. The changes in the CTR law position the program to better support investments in the state highway system and more closely align with planning under the Growth Management Act. An additional \$3.9 million provided for the vanpooling program will also increase the CTR program's effectiveness.

The CTR Efficiency Act implements many of the recommendations contained in the *2005 CTR Task Force Report to the Legislature*. The most significant changes to the CTR law include:

- focusing the program on the most congested urban areas, rather than on counties;
- increasing the planning coordination among local jurisdictions, planning organizations, and the state;
- providing state incentives and technical assistance to local jurisdictions to develop customized trip reduction programs in key employment and residential centers; and
- streamlining the CTR Task Force into a smaller, more policy-oriented CTR board.

Implementing the legislation will require updating the state guidelines, creating regional plans, and updating local plans and policies. Everyone involved—affected local jurisdictions, regional transportation planning organizations, major employers, transit agencies, WSDOT, and the CTR board—will need to work collaboratively over the next 18 months to implement the changes.

To get involved or to be kept informed of progress, contact Keith Cotton at (360) 705-7910 or cottonk@wsdot.wa.gov.

Washington vanpool model being used in Kentucky

Vanpooling has grown significantly in Washington State thanks to legislative support and innovation in the Statewide Vanpool Program and vanpool operators. During the last two years, the number of vanpool vehicles on Washington's roads increased by 25 percent to a record high of 1,988 vehicles. The program's success is spreading beyond our state borders.

When construction worker, Ray Birley, was laid off at Hanford, he got a job on a dam-building project in Kentucky and relocated to Paducah. The former vanpool driver for Ben Franklin Transit made a few 80-mile round-trip commutes by himself, then approached Paducah Area Transit System General Manager, Gary Kitchens, with a proposal to start a vanpool program.

Kitchens commented, "Parking is limited at the construction site and the route to the site is congested in places, so I could immediately see the benefits of this type of program." He contacted Dave Rodrick, Ben Franklin Transit Vanpool Supervisor, for guidance and then started a vanpool program in Paducah. "What Washington has done has been very helpful. Having the tools—good information, a model contract, and policies—is helping us get our program off the ground quickly."

The 2006 Legislature has provided an additional \$3.9 million for vanpooling to support continued growth in the Statewide Vanpool Program and increase the effectiveness of the CTR Program.

Announcements

USDOT is taking comments on rules for transportation for individuals with disabilities

With the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act - A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) enacted into law on August 10, 2005, the US Department of Transportation (USDOT) is implementing many policy provisions into law. The USDOT is proposing to amend its Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and section 504 regulations to:

- update requirements concerning rail station platforms
- clarify that public transit providers are required to make modifications to policies and practices to ensure that their programs are accessible to individuals with disabilities
- codify the Department's practice concerning the issuance of guidance on disability matters

Comments on this proposed rule making should be submitted by April 28, 2006. For more information about the proposed changes and to find out how to submit your comments, follow this link (scroll down for the notice on transportation for individuals with disabilities): www.apta.com/government_affairs/safetea_lu/rulemaking_page.cfm

Call for workshop topics and speakers for state's Public Transportation Conference

WSDOT is now accepting proposals for workshop topics and speakers for the 30th Annual Public Transportation Conference and Expo. Whether you would like to present a workshop or just have an idea for a great topic or speaker, we want to hear from you. We're looking for workshop ideas that relate to this year's conference theme, "Public Transportation: Delivering Value."

The conference will be held at the DoubleTree Hotel in Bellevue, Washington on August 14-16, 2006. Workshop and speaker proposals are due by June 1. To learn more about the conference and to submit your ideas, visit our Web site at www.wsdot.wa.gov/transit/conference.

Upcoming Events

Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation (ACCT) meeting

Friday, April 7

9:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Large Commission Board Room (1D2)

Department of Transportation Building

310 Maple Park Avenue SE, Olympia

During the April meeting, the council will address multifunction vehicles, with input from representatives of transit, schools, and the WSDOT vehicle procurement program. ACCT meetings are open to the public and time is reserved at the end of the meeting for comments and questions. To confirm meeting times and locations, visit:

www.wsdot.wa.gov/acct/acct_meetings.htm.

Office of Transit Mobility Advisory Committee meeting

Friday, April 14

10:00am-12:00pm

Urban Corridors Office 2nd Floor conference room

401 2nd Ave South, Seattle

The committee will identify key principles for performance measures. This meeting is open to the public. For more information, visit: www.wsdot.wa.gov/transit/otm/ or call (206) 464-1238.

Commute Trip Reduction Task Force

Friday, April 28

11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Location TBD

The agenda will focus on implementation plans for 2006 legislative changes. For information, contact Robin Hartsell at 360-705-7508 or hartser@wsdot.wa.gov.

WSDOT's 30th Annual Public Transportation Conference

Monday–Wednesday, August 14–16, 2006

DoubleTree Hotel

300 112th Avenue SE

Bellevue, Washington

This three-day conference brings together 400-500 people dedicated to providing or supporting public transportation in Washington State. Attendees include public transportation providers, planners, and advocates as well as consulting firms, civic leaders, and suppliers of public transportation related products and services. For more information, visit:

www.wsdot.wa.gov/transit/conference.

17th National Rural Public and Intercity Bus Transportation Conference

Sunday–Wednesday, October 22–25, 2006

Skamania Lodge and Conference Center

Stevenson, Washington

This national conference, held once every two years, offers a valuable experience for rural transit and human service transit providers, tribal transit managers, planners, state agency staff, intercity bus operators, consultants, researchers and trainers—anyone who is interested in learning about the latest in best practices and current research in rural public and intercity bus transportation. For more information, visit: <http://www.trbruralconference.org/>.